Vote Center Option Can Make Voting Easier, Less Expensive

- Most Illinois residents can vote early at all polling locations in their area, but are given just one location on Election Day.
- Vote Centers allow voters to choose any location within their area, and can be extended to Election Day to provide consistency and convenience.
- 14 states offer Election Day Vote Centers, with some saving an average of 40% on election-related expenses.

"Vote Center" Model Already in Place for Early Voting

In 2016, at least 30% of Illinois voters cast their ballots during the Early Voting period, prior to Election Day. As Early Voting becomes more popular, voters have become accustomed to its convenience.
During the Early Voting period, voting is "universal," meaning that voters can visit any local Early Voting site to cast a ballot. However, on Election Day, voters are required to visit their local precinct, based on their home address, and are no longer able to vote anywhere in their area.

Election administrators across the state have expressed the desire to keep the universal voting model, called "Vote Centers," throughout the Early Voting period and Election Day. **This option would not only provide continuity in the voting process for voters, but could result in significant cost savings and a better voting experience for Illinois residents.**

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**States Utilizing Vote Centers**

*Usage Planned for 2018 Elections*

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**Vote Centers Offer Significant Benefits**

Vote Centers act as universal, centrally-located polling places for election
jurisdictions, and have been used across the country to consolidate election precincts and invest resources more efficiently. While there may be fewer polling places set up under this model, the consistency, convenience, efficiency, and of Vote Centers can lead to a better overall voting experience. Vote Centers also minimize confusion by allowing voters to follow the same practices for Early Voting and Election Day.

In addition to extending a convenience for voters, Vote Centers have the potential to significantly decrease administration costs on Election Day by consolidating and maximizing resources. If election jurisdictions choose to utilize Vote Centers, they could see cost savings in ballot printing, equipment purchasing, maintenance, and salaries for poll workers. Because fewer poll workers are required for Vote Centers, a stronger priority can be put on selection and training.

Vote Centers can also mitigate the potential for voter fraud, by connecting all local polling places with electronic poll books. If a resident attempts to vote twice within their jurisdiction, records will immediately show that they have already cast their ballot elsewhere.

**Vote Center Success in Other States**

Fourteen states currently allow local election jurisdictions to use Vote Centers on Election Day. Several others, including Illinois, utilize universal voting locations during early voting, but require people to vote in-precinct on Election Day.

An analysis conducted by Pew Charitable Trusts found that election jurisdictions in Colorado saved an average of 40 percent on election costs after the state implemented voting reforms, including Vote Centers, in 2013. The report explains the efficiencies were in large part due to the use of Vote Centers, and decreases in labor and printing costs accounted for significant portions of the cost reduction. The report also notes that in a survey of over 1,500 voters, 96% reported that they were satisfied, or very satisfied, with their voting experience.

Jurisdictions in Colorado have also worked to make Vote Centers work for a variety of demographics. In urban areas, Vote Centers are positioned near heavy traffic areas, larger residential areas, major employers, and city bus
routes. In rural areas, they are positioned at recognizable community landmark locations, often the same locations as the prior precinct polling places.

Indiana successfully piloted Vote Centers in three counties in 2010. A statewide assessment found that every Indiana county could save at least 20 percent by implementing vote centers, and some counties were projected to save as much as 59 percent. A Ball State University study also found that 80% of voters surveyed in the pilot program preferred Vote Centers to the traditional precinct-based model.

In order to become a "Vote Center County" in Indiana, jurisdictions must submit a public transition plan to the County Election Board, take comments at a public hearing, and receive public comments online for a period of at least 30 days. The County Election Board then votes to approve or amend the plan based on public feedback. ICPR would recommend a similar approval process for Illinois election jurisdictions interested in adopting the Vote Center model.

**Next Steps**
If an election jurisdiction chooses to extend their Vote Center usage to Election Day, there are certain considerations that must be made. Vote Centers should be available and convenient for everyone in the area. **Specific goals for vote center locations should include:**

- Close proximity to bus routes or other forms of public transportation
- Convenient locations along major local thoroughfares
- Parking should be easily accessible
- Handicapped accessibility must be provided
- Internet connection is required
- Floor plan must be conducive to heavy foot traffic for the entire Early Voting and Election Day period

For Illinois, giving jurisdictions the option of using Vote Centers would align Early Voting with Election Day voting, and would allow election administrators to utilize their resources more effectively. The number of Vote Centers required per registered voter can be modified based on the number of voters in a jurisdiction.

Not all jurisdictions may be suitable for Vote Centers on Election Day, so the
addition of this model should begin as an opt-in or pilot program. **ICPR is working with the Illinois State Board of Elections and local election jurisdictions to allow counties and cities the option to extend their use of Vote Centers to Election Day.**

What do you think about making Vote Centers an option for Illinois? Send us your feedback at outreach@ilcampaign.org.

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Research contributed by Policy Director Colin Williams.

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